



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Impetigo

What is impetigo?

Impetigo (imp-uh-tie-go) is a common skin infection caused by either *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph), or group A Streptococcus (strep) bacteria. Impetigo can occur when strep or staph bacteria enter the skin through cuts or insect bites causing red, painless blister-like bumps on the face (typically around the nose and mouth) that weep fluid and progress to yellowish crusted sores. Impetigo can also occur in intact, healthy skin.

How is impetigo spread?

Impetigo is spread by direct contact with drainage from the sores or from respiratory secretions from the nose and throat of an infected person. The sores have large numbers of bacteria present, so impetigo is very contagious. Hands soiled with the drainage from the sores can contaminate other surfaces and spread the infection to other parts of the body through hand-to-skin contact. Lesions will appear 1-3 days after the person is infected. Children should remain at home from daycare and school until receiving 24 hours of antibiotic therapy (for more severe cases) and all of the sores have crusted over.

Who is at risk for impetigo?

Those with cuts or open breaks in the skin who come in contact with the bacteria are at greatest risk for infection. Crowded conditions and participation in skin-to-skin contact activities, such as sports, can increase the risk of infection. Persons who have chronic (long-term) skin conditions, such as eczema, are also more likely to get impetigo. Impetigo is most common among children 2-6 years of age.

How do I know if I have impetigo?

Symptoms start with red or blister-like sores surrounded by red skin. These sores can appear anywhere on the body, but mostly on the face, arms, and legs. The lesions fill with pus, break open after a few days, and form a thick, honey-colored crust. Itching is common. The sores usually are not painful, although they may be tender to the touch. Your health care provider can diagnose impetigo by looking at the skin lesions, and may order laboratory testing to determine which type of bacteria are causing the infection.

How is impetigo treated?

Your health care provider may suggest only hygienic measures for minor cases. Keeping the skin clean can help mild infections heal on their own. Antibiotic creams and ointments can be used on the surface of the sores. Be sure to follow your health care provider's directions completely if given a cream or ointment. Oral antibiotics may also be used to treat impetigo. It is very important to take the full course of therapy to prevent reinfection and reduce the chance for antibiotic resistance to develop.

How is impetigo prevented?

The main way to prevent impetigo is keeping the skin clean by:

- Bathing or showering each day with soap and water
- Keeping fingernails short and clean
- Washing all cuts, scratches, insect bites, or other wounds with soap and water

Other ways to prevent impetigo include:

- Avoid close contact with someone who has impetigo
- Keep an infected person home until no longer contagious
- Avoid scratching the sores if infected

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website on group A strep bacteria:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal_g.htm

Mayo Clinic website on impetigo at:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/impetigo/DS00464>

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